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Committee on Conferences
Substantive session of 2000

Draft report

Addendum

Rapporteur: Mr. Peter **Van De Velde** (Belgium)

II. Documentation and publication-related matters

B. Compliance with the regulations concerning page limits

1. The General Assembly, in its resolution 53/208 B of 18 December 1998, stressed the need for compliance with the existing page limits for documents; invited all intergovernmental bodies to consider, where appropriate, the possibility of further reducing the length of their reports from 32 to 20 pages; called upon the Secretariat to make its procedures for obtaining waivers to the 16-page rule more rigorous, while maintaining the necessary degree of flexibility, with a view to encouraging author departments to reduce the length of their submissions while maintaining high standards of quality; and requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Committee on Conferences, every two years, updated information on the number and length of documents.

2. At its 430th meeting, on 7 August 2000, the Committee considered a note by the Secretariat on the matter (A/AC.172/2000/CRP.2). In introducing the report, the representative of the Secretariat noted that, although the number of documents above the page limits accounted for only 10 per cent of the total, they constituted 54 per cent of the total workload. That meant that even a moderate reduction in the number of documents exceeding the page limits could significantly reduce the workload; hence the importance of making waiver procedures more rigorous.

3. He also reported that the double-column format was now being used in all six official languages.

4. He noted that, in future reports, page brackets might be combined to cover documents of 21-32 pages and of 33-100 pages, and that data for the previous two years might be presented in the same tables for comparison.

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Discussion

5. The view was expressed that one way to reduce the length of documents would be to eliminate repetitive background information and to refer instead to previous documents on the same subject matter. End-users could establish an archive of basic reference documents, and only new material would need to be reflected in the most recent report. It was noted, however, that that approach might not be feasible for every type of document.

6. It was suggested, on the one hand, that the same approach might also be taken for resolutions, in which, in some cases, a large percentage of material was repeated from year to year. On the other hand, it was pointed out that, although possibly repetitive, much of the material in resolutions was politically sensitive, and it was necessary to reflect consensus reached.

Recommendations and conclusions

7. The Committee noted that, although the number and proportion of documents issued in accordance with the established and desirable page limits had increased, compliance with the limitation targets for both intergovernmental and secretariat documents continued to be only partial.

8. The Committee further noted that documents that were significantly in excess of the page limit, especially when submitted late, created an additional burden for the processing services and could jeopardize timely issuance and compromise quality. Efforts to further reduce the length of documents should therefore be concentrated on those cases in which page limits were applicable or desirable, since such documents made up 50 per cent of all documentation and accounted for close to 80 per cent of their total volume.